

Historic Preservation Fund Grant Application Advice

Since Historic Preservation Fund grant applications are available, now is a good time to give some advice on preparing and submitting grant applications, and how to be good grant recipients.

Preparing the grant application

Getting started

#1. Verify your project's eligibility. Make sure your property meets National Register requirements; that your project meet the grant deadlines; that you have the required match on-hand; that the scope of work meets the intent of the program; and that you understand the grant process and its conditions (reimbursement, covenants, product review, etc.).

#2. Read the instructions. Even if you have applied before, the HPF application packets are revised every year. Make sure you understand any new requirements or changes to procedures. Beware of becoming complacent with your applications or assuming that the procedures or project requirements haven't changed.

#3. Your proposal = your project. Remember that your project, if funded, will be based on your proposal. So, plan accordingly with your scope of work, your budget and match, and your project timetable.

Writing the proposal

#1. Project description and narrative. This is the "executive summary" of your project. Be thorough, concise, and specific. Describe the need or significance of the project, itemize the activities, products or data to be collected, outline the methodology. The project should be well-thought out and the proposal should demonstrate that. If the proposal will complete one phase of a multi-phase project, or will assist with discrete items in a larger project, provide a clear explanation of what the HPF grant will fund.

#2. Budget. Do your homework on what your project will cost. Research the likely costs and provide documentation (i.e. copies of estimates from contractors). Do not include unallowable costs. Remember, the HPF budget is a "one-pot" budget, where the cost of the project is split either 50/50 or 70/30. Grant costs and match are combined, not separated into a 3-column budget. If awarded, any costs included on the grant budget would need to be documented for reimbursement; and any costs in the grant budget are subject to procurement requirements.

#3. Matching Share. Be sure you are using the appropriate funding ratio, in most cases it is 50/50, only historic structure county surveys or large-scale archaeological surveys are eligible for the 70/30 ratio. Matching share should be on-hand, not "in the works" or being raised. In-kind donations should be documented by a letter of commitment. Cash should be documented with bank or other financial statements. Universities or local government should provide department budgets. The matching share form on its own will not earn all the available points without documentation.

#4. Do your math. Make sure your budget form, budget justification, matching share, etc. all add up and make sure your numbers are consistent throughout the application. Double-check the cover sheet, the budget form, the matching share form, and your documentation for errors.

#5. Timetable. Be realistic, plan for the grant cycle deadlines, include procurement or bidding (if applicable), include necessary review of products by DHPA staff and time for revisions. Factor in CLG reviews, the possibility of larger-than-expected data recovery, or weather-based rehabilitation work. Projects must be complete by June 30 of the following year. Be careful not to bite off more than you can chew!

#6. Project personnel. Identify the project coordinator, this should be the person who will be the main contact for the project; this person should understand and be committed to the project and the grant program. The PC must attend the grant start-up meeting and be responsible for much of the project paperwork. The principal investigator must meet professional qualifications, and can either be identified in the proposal (on staff, under contract, donating services, or off-budget) or hired later (must be procured through a bidding process if on-budget).

#7. Ready, set, go? Due to the relatively short HPF timetable (about 13 months: May 1-June 30 of the following year), the proposal should demonstrate that the project would be ready to go, if awarded. Anything that is unclear in the application, particularly scope of work, budget, match, or timetable, can be detrimental to the proposal's scores.

#8. Proofread. Proofread your proposal for spelling errors, incomplete sentences, unclear explanations, erroneous math. Make sure you have all the components, in the order they are requested, that all forms are completed and signed. Have you given in to over-use of "copy and paste" throughout the application (do you read the same sentence in multiple places?). Show your passion and enthusiasm for the project, but make sure the information and attachments are relevant. Have someone else read it, does it make sense to a person not familiar with your project?

Preparing the application is only part of the process. If the grant is awarded, you now have to complete the project that you proposed, based on what you provided in the application. Here are some tips for being a good grant recipient:

#1. Change happens. If anything has changed from the application, notify the DHPA staff immediately, so that the project paperwork can accurately reflect your project. There is a period of about six months between the application deadline and the official grant awards. There are also changes that come up during the project, particularly with discovery issues on rehab projects or inclement weather with archaeology. It is very important to communicate with the DHPA if any issues or changes arise that affect the scope of work, timetable, or budget.

#2. Don't jump the gun. The DHPA will send an official grant award packet that requires response within 30-days for acceptance. The DHPA will also schedule a start-up meeting with the project coordinator to review grant requirements and procedures. Be careful not to proceed with anything that could jeopardize your project. However, once initiated, keep your project moving.

#3. Read the grant material provided. Review and familiarize yourself with the HPF Grants Manual, your project paperwork, and any requirements for your activity (National Register, Secretary of the Interior's Standards, IAC statutes for archaeology, etc.). Verify the project paperwork accurately describes your project, know the project deadlines. If you have received a grant previously, it is still a good idea to re-read the HPF Grants Manual for any updates or revisions that may have been implemented.

#4. Stay organized. Keep a dedicated HPF grant file for the project. Put progress report due dates in your calendar. Know your progress benchmarks and keep track of meeting them. Keep careful accounting of your expenditures and make copies of invoices, receipts, payments. Timeliness of reporting, accuracy and completeness of reimbursement invoices, etc., these depend on being organized.

#5. Stay on schedule. Your project is your responsibility, it is the job of the project coordinator and principal investigator to keep the project on track, meet deadlines, and be completed on-time.

#6. Communicate throughout the project. If an unexpected situation arises, contact the DHPA. Changes in scope of work, budget, or timetable may require revisions to the project paperwork, or even need National Park Service approval.

#7. Provide proper acknowledgement. Your mother always said to say "thank you," but acknowledging the HPF funding is not just a nice thing to do, it's required. Review the HPF Grants Manual for requirements for press releases, publications, websites, and other materials.

#8. Establish a good track record. Particularly if you may have other projects in mind for the future. The DHPA considers past performance of timeliness, diligence, attention to details, acknowledgement of HPF, and successful completion of previous projects, as part of the evaluation for repeat applicants.

#9. Magic formula for success = diligence + hard work + attention to details + common sense.

#10. Partnership is the key word. HPF grants are a partnership between the applicant and the DHPA. It is important for all parties to "hold up their end of the bargain." Failure to do so can jeopardize the grant contract.

Remember that the HPF program is administered by the DHPA based on the parameters established by the National Park Service and requirements of federal grants and state statutes. As the State Historic Preservation Office, the DHPA staff interprets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, determines National Register eligibility, and regulates archaeological activity, so keep in touch with the grant staff about your project.